

Sanilac & Tuscola County Animal Control
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May 22, 2007

To Whom It May Concern:

Sanilac County Animal Control Officers Tina Vinokurov, James Matson, and Danielle Galbenski **strongly support** HB 4551, Rep. John Espinoza and HB 4552, Rep. Pam Byrnes. Michigan Animal cruelty laws are not strong enough and in many cases, too broad. This makes it very difficult for law enforcement officers and animal control officers, like ourselves, to be effective enough in what we do and to really be able to make a difference. Many people charged with animal cruelty are repeat offenders due to punishment not being severe enough and only after two years of committing animal cruelty, the person is allowed to own animals again. The process then must be repeated again and again, wasting time, money, and effort, and not to mention, more animals will be neglected and abused.

Regarding the Sanilac County Animal Cruelty case involving Fred Jacklett, the outcome of the case was disappointing. I think everyone who was at the farm that day or read the accounts in the newspaper were outraged. Unfortunately, with the laws at that time, we were not able to adequately punish Mr. Jacklett in the way we feel he should have been and in the way many citizens felt he should have been punished. We are hoping that these changes to the laws will pass and that future cases similar to the Jacklett case will enable the system to prosecute future animal abuse cases in a more aggressive and severe nature.

Animal Control Officers
Tina Vinokurov
James Matson
Danielle Galbenski

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Article published Jan 20, 2007

Cruelty suspects in court

Couple faces fines, jail time on animal abuse charges

By MOLLY MONTAG
Times Herald

SANDUSKY- A Buel Township man and woman pleaded not guilty Friday to misdemeanor animal-cruelty charges stemming from the New Year's Day discovery of more than 70 malnourished or dead animals on a farm where they live.

About 15 people watched from the gallery as Fred V. Jacklett Jr., 21, and Laurie McConnell, 42, were arraigned on five counts each of animal cruelty in Sanilac County District Court. The charges stem from failing to provide adequate care in October and December to the animals at 3450 E. Marlette Road.

During the Jan. 1 raid, police seized about 45 malnourished goats, sheep, pigs and other animals and buried 33 dead animals.

Sanilac County Prosecutor James V. Young said he was not able to charge the pair with felony animal-cruelty charges because the law requires "willful, malicious intent" to harm or kill.

Only five charges were issued for each person, Young said, because the maximum jail time possible is 93 days no matter how many charges a person faces.

The pair also faces up to a \$1,000 fine, community service and restitution.

"My job is to do justice, not to utilize the courts or the media for another purpose," Young said.

District Judge James A. Marcus scheduled Jacklett and McConnell to appear for a pretrial hearing at 9 a.m. Jan. 29 in Sandusky.

"In the interim while this case is pending, you are not to have any animals in your possession," he told the pair in court.

Jacklett and McConnell are free on bond.

Justice

Susan Elwell, a Pennsylvania woman who identified herself as Jacklett's cousin, said relatives are "outraged" about conditions at the farm.

In a telephone interview, Elwell, 28, said she learned about the case recently while in town for her grandmother's memorial service in Carsonville.

Elwell said she refused to speak with Jacklett after learning details of the investigation.

"It was really hard to not confront him myself, but there was a preacher present," she said.

Police called conditions at the farm the worst they have ever seen. They said sows were eating their own young, and at least one sheep had rubbed the wool off its backs trying to reach hay on the other side of a paddock fence.

Authorities confiscated a horse, a steer, pigs, rabbits, dogs, an exotic bird, iguanas, ducks, chickens and geese.

Sheriff deputies originally requested prosecutors charge Jacklett, the farm owner, with 191 charges - including 88 felonies.

Young said the conditions were appalling, but the criminal statutes did not allow him to charge the defendants with felonies. He said he will cooperate with any citizens or service groups that want to work to strengthen animal-cruelty laws.

"It would be nice to have a statute that said we could've charged as a felony," Young said.

Jacklett thinks authorities are exaggerating the conditions on the farm and believes he can prove himself innocent, Elwell said.

"He's going to be hit hard, and he totally deserves it," she said.

Elwell said she spent time during the summer at the farm Jacklett's father owns in Carsonville. Some family members knew Jacklett didn't feed his animals as much as he should, Elwell said, but they may not have known the extent of the conditions.

At the time of the raid, Jacklett told police he had been "too busy partying" to feed the animals.

"My aunt even stole a dog from him and named him Lucky, because he was lucky he didn't live with 'Little Fred,'" Elwell said.

'A good home'

Mary Haskins of Marlette said she regularly saw Jacklett and McConnell buying animals at weekly sales at the Croswell Stockyards Flea & Farm Market.

Haskins, along with several other people, said she is not sure of the connection between Jacklett and McConnell.

Jacklett often bought animals at the sale, Haskins said, and advertised himself as a good home for animals nobody wanted.

"He had a sign saying he'll take free animals," she said.

Several caretakers of the animals rescued from Jacklett's farm attended the arraignment on Friday.

One of them, Bob Crookshank of Washington Township, said he hoped Jacklett isn't allowed to buy more animals.

"I hope the man gets the help he needs, and I hope he's never allowed to own an animal again," Crookshank said.

Crookshank and his wife, Gail, have been caring for Echo, a malnourished horse rescued from the farm.

"She's a sweetheart and how anyone could do that to her, I don't know," Gail Crookshank said.

Charles and Lin Ernest of Speaker Township hope to get two of the smallest goats they are nursing back to health. They took several sheep and goats from the farm.

One of the smallest goats, Itty Bitty, is gaining weight but can no longer stand.

One sheep has pneumonia.

"I don't expect them to hang the guy, but we've got to send the message this is the wrong thing to do," he said.



01/02/2007

Sanilac man is arrested on animal cruelty charges

STACY LANGLEY, The Huron Daily Tribune

BUEL TOWNSHIP — A 21-year-old Sanilac County man was taken into custody Monday on animal cruelty charges after deputies from the Sanilac County Sheriff's office discovered 33 dead animals and another 45 malnourished animals at the Marlette Road property.

According to a press release from Lt. Jim Wagester of the Sanilac County Sheriff's Office, deputies executed a search warrant at 3450 E. Marlette Road after receiving a complaint of animal cruelty.

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Wagester reports that when deputies entered the property they "were shocked to what awaited them."

"There were dead animals located in an open pasture and under a pickup topper in two separate barns along with dogs in dog houses. The animals included sheep, goats, geese, ducks, pigs, rabbits and dogs, approximately 33 dead animals in all," said Wagester. "An operator and back-hoe were brought to the property to bury the animals, while deputies, animal control officers along with volunteers secured the remaining animals that were still alive but very weak."

Wagester described the remaining 45 animals as malnourished, without shelter, food or water. Those animals were removed from the property to an undisclosed location for further evaluation by a veterinarian.

The 21-year-old male at the residence was interviewed by police and taken into custody on animal cruelty charges. A second person, a 45-year-old female, also was interviewed and is being considered a "person of interest." Deputies are seeking charges of animal cruelty against the female as well.

Deputies were assisted at the scene by Sanilac County Animal Control, Lakeside Excavating from Carsonville and several volunteers.

No other information is available at this time.

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Article published Jan 24, 2007

Decision regarding charges in animal-cruelty case is wrong

After reading the article "Cruelty suspects in court," I am questioning my intelligence. Either I read this article wrong, or I am an idiot.

The article states: "Forty-five malnourished goats, sheep, pigs and 33 dead animals, which included dogs, were found on the premises." The article then goes on to say the prosecuting attorney, James V. Young, said he was not able to charge the pair with felony animal-cruelty charges because the law requires willful, malicious intent to harm or kill.

Well, with 33 dead animals and 45 more on the verge of death - may I ask what other than death could have been their intentions?

Nothing was noted in this article regarding a psychological evaluation as to whether Fred V. Jacklett and Laurie McConnell are sane enough to stand trial, let alone be out in our communities. No human beings could allow such suffering to take place unless they were severely mentally ill.

The worst death, the most painful end, is that of starvation. The cries of these animals had to have been heard.

Knowing our law-enforcement system did their job (sheriff deputies originally requested prosecutors charge Jacklett, the farm owner, with 191 charges, including 88 felonies) and our judicial system failed by allowing them released on misdemeanor charges, sickens me.

Mr. Young, please respond with an explanation I can understand.

SANDRA KILBY

St. Clair, Jan. 22

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Article published Feb 12, 2007
Tougher laws needed for animal cruelty
Misdemeanors too lenient

What's still difficult to understand in the Buel Township animal cruelty scandal is how farm animals could be so unspeakably abused. What's still difficult to accept is those responsible weren't punished more severely.

More than 70 dead or starving animals were discovered on Fred V. Jacklett Jr.'s farm in a New Year's Day police raid. Despite their profound neglect, the state's animal-cruelty laws don't provide for harsher penalties with the exception of dog fighting or weapon assaults against animals.

That must change. State lawmakers must strengthen those laws. The mistreatment the animals at the Jacklett farm endured was too unspeakable to be limited to misdemeanors. That kind of abuse ought to meet felony standards.

Jacklett and Laurie McConnell answered for their crimes. It's a shame the punishment wasn't more severe and that the public didn't see them confess.

The pair was scheduled to appear at a pretrial hearing Friday at Sanilac County District Court in Sandusky. Instead, Jacklett, 21, pleaded guilty Feb. 2 to five misdemeanor animal-cruelty charges before District Judge James A. Marcus. McConnell, 42, also pleaded guilty to five misdemeanor animal-cruelty charges on Feb. 5.

McConnell was sentenced to 30 days in jail with 60 days held in abeyance. Her two years probation also bars her from having animals. In addition, she must undergo mental-health counseling and serve 15 days community service.

Their punishments won't satisfy members of this community who were shocked by the callous mistreatment of the animals in the care of Jacklett and McConnell — and they're right: The wholesale abuse and the absence of any real explanation is unacceptable.

Lansing must strengthen animal-cruelty laws.

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Article published Jan 20, 2007
Residents: Penalties are too light

By MOLLY MONTAG
Times Herald

Many Sanilac County residents said they are disgusted with the conditions of animals found Jan. 1 on a Buel Township farm and would like to see those responsible charged with felonies.

Pattie Watters of Peck is among the group who would like to see Fred V. Jacklett Jr., 21, and Laurie McConnell, 42, face more than a maximum 93-day jail sentence.

"They ought to just treat them like (the animals) were treated," Watters said.

Jacklett and McConnell were arraigned Friday in Sanilac County District Court in Sandusky on five counts each of misdemeanor animal cruelty. Prosecutor James V. Young said criminal statutes do not allow for the charges to be more severe.

Aside from jail time, they face a maximum fine of \$1,000, community service and restitution for the animals' care. Both Jacklett, who owns the 3450 E. Marlette Road farm, and McConnell, who had been living there with Jacklett, were responsible for the animals' care, officials have said.

During the Jan. 1 police raid, 33 dead animals, including dogs and goats, were found and buried. About 45 animals were found malnourished.

About 15 people showed up at Friday's arraignment before District Judge James A. Marcus.

Carl Jones, 16, of Peck wasn't there but said the pair deserves a harsher sentence than what misdemeanors bring.

"They should've had to do more time for all that," he said.

Dennis Walpole of Lexington was at the arraignment. He said he is especially disturbed by reports that provisions for the animals were on the farm but not being used.

"The feed was in reach (and) the water was in reach," Walpole said. "It was almost like he was tempting them."

Selling or giving away animals you can't afford is an easy way to avoid this type of situation said Sue Marango of Lexington Township, who was at the arraignment.

"If you're going to have animals you take care of them," she said. "If you can't afford to take care of them, then don't have them."